

# MOST GALLANT WARRIOR

Chief of Defence Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston saluted another SAS man in January following the awarding of a second Victoria Cross to a current-serving member of the ADF – Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith.

**S**peaking at the investiture ceremony at Campbell Barracks in Perth on 23 January, Air Chief Marshal Houston said Corporal Roberts-Smith had brought great credit to himself, the Australian Army, the Special Air Service Regiment and the Australian Defence Force.

"Today, we in the military feel great admiration and respect for the extreme valour shown by Corporal Roberts-Smith and we are honoured to call him one of our own," Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

"In choosing to serve our nation, the men and women of the Australian Defence Force display courage, initiative and self-sacrifice every day. But, in Afghanistan on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, Corporal Roberts-Smith went far beyond what we would ordinarily expect.

"In the most dangerous and demanding of situations – when his patrol was outnumbered and his life and the lives of his mates were under extreme threat – Corporal Roberts-Smith cast aside concern for his own safety and placed his mates' lives above his own."

Air Chief Marshal Houston said that, within the military, it was a mark of the utmost respect that all, no matter their rank, saluted a Victoria Cross recipient.

"It is a great source of delight to me that, as of today, there are now two serving members of the Australian Defence Force I have the great honour to salute.

"Corporal Benjamin Roberts-Smith, VC, MG – we are enormously proud of you."

Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie remarked on the tremendous humility shown by Australia's newest VC winner.

"All Australian soldiers should feel tremendously proud of the actions of Corporal Roberts-Smith, and the recognition that the award of the Victoria Cross represents," Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie said.

"The valour of his actions and those of the other members of his patrol, are exemplars of the very best in Australian soldiering.

"He is a soldier who embodies Army's values of courage, initiative and teamwork and the ethos of the Special Air Service Regiment.

"He is held in the highest esteem by his peers, subordinates and superiors alike for his personal attributes and his professionalism."

Corporal Roberts-Smith said he was honoured and humbled by the award.

"I am so very proud to have taken part in that action with my mates," he said.

"This award also belongs to them and to the Regiment.

"To my family, my beautiful wife Emma and our baby girls, Eve and Elizabeth, thank you for your enduring support and encouragement."

Defence Minister Steven Smith said Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith joined the ranks of an elite fraternity.

"I know from my visits here to Campbell Barracks and discussions with members of your Regiment, that accolades do not sit comfortably with those who have earned the sandy beret," Minister Smith said.

"I am told this is even more so the case for those small number who have earned the Victoria Cross.

"But today we are bound to accord honour and accolade to you as an act of dedication.

"You serve now for all time as a reminder that a young Australian is capable of an extraordinary act of valour, capable of a standard of courage, of audacity and single-minded determination to help and to protect others.

"Today, our nation honours you as a truly brave and extraordinarily daring Australian soldier.

"Your family, your friends and your comrades take great pride in you and celebrate you as a son, a husband, a father and a mate.

"We honour you for showing the heights to which one can rise, as your unit's motto challenges us, if only we dare."

**IN THE MOST DANGEROUS AND DEMANDING OF SITUATIONS – WHEN HIS PATROL WAS OUTNUMBERED AND HIS LIFE AND THE LIVES OF HIS MATES WERE UNDER EXTREME THREAT – CORPORAL ROBERTS-SMITH CAST ASIDE CONCERN FOR HIS OWN SAFETY AND PLACED HIS MATES' LIVES ABOVE HIS OWN.**



Two current-serving SAS VC winners – Corporals Mark Donahoe and Ben Roberts-Smith

# Victoria Cross



**F**or the most conspicuous gallantry in action in circumstances of extreme peril, as patrol second-in-command, Special Operations Task Group on Operation Slipper.

On 11 June 2010, a troop of the Special Operations Task Group conducted a helicopter assault into Tizak, Kandahar Province, in order to capture or kill a senior Taliban commander.

Immediately upon the helicopter insertion, the troop was engaged by machine-gun and rocket-propelled-grenade fire from multiple, dominating positions.

Two soldiers were wounded and the troop was pinned down by fire from three machine guns in an elevated, fortified position.

Under the cover of close air support, suppressive small-arms and machine-gun fire, Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol manoeuvred to within 70m of the enemy position in order to neutralise the enemy machine gun positions and regain the initiative.

Upon commencement of the assault, the patrol drew very heavy, intense, effective and sustained fire from the enemy position.

Corporal Roberts-Smith and his patrol members fought towards the enemy position until, at a range of 40m, the weight of fire prevented further movement forward.

At this point, Corporal Roberts-Smith identified the opportunity to exploit some cover provided by a small structure.

As he approached the structure, he identified an insurgent grenadier in the throes of engaging his patrol.

Corporal Roberts Smith instinctively engaged the insurgent at point-blank range resulting in the death of the insurgent.

With the members of his patrol still pinned down by the three enemy machine-gun positions, he exposed his own position in order to draw fire away from his patrol, which enabled his colleagues to bring fire to bear against the enemy.

Corporal Roberts-Smith's actions enabled his patrol commander to throw a grenade and silence one of the machine guns.

Seizing the advantage, and demonstrating extreme devotion to duty and the most conspicuous gallantry, Corporal Roberts-Smith, with total disregard for his

own safety, stormed the enemy position killing the two remaining machine gunners.

His act of valour enabled his patrol to break in to the enemy position and to lift the weight of fire from the remainder of the troop who had been pinned down.

On seizing the fortified gun position, Corporal Roberts-Smith then took the initiative again and continued to assault enemy positions in depth, during which time, he and another patrol member engaged and killed further enemy, enabling his troop to go on and clear the village.



**O**n the night of 31 May 2006, Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith was employed as a patrol scout and sniper in a patrol that was tasked with establishing an observation post near the Chora Pass in extremely rugged terrain overlooking a militia sanctuary.

Early in the patrol, after an arduous 10-hour infiltration up the side of a mountain, on foot, the patrol was required to coordinate offensive air support to assist a combined Special Operations Task Group and other special-forces patrols who were in contact with the Anti Coalition Militia in the valley.

Following this engagement, the patrol remained in the observation post to continue providing vital information on the militia in the area.

This comprehensive reporting had a significant effect on shaping the subsequent coalition-forces operation.

On 2 June, the observation post had become the focus of the militia force and repeated attempts to locate and surround the position ensued and, in one particular incident, they attempted to outflank the Australians.

Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith was part of a two-man team tasked to move out of their relatively secure observation post in order to locate and neutralise the militia and regain the initiative.

This task was successfully achieved.

In another incident, two anti-coalition militia attempted to attack the observation post from a different flank and Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith again moved to neutralise them.

He then realised that the forward edge of the observation post was not secure and made the decision to split the team and take up an exposed position forward of the patrol so he could effectively employ his sniper weapon.

While isolated in this precarious position, he observed a group of 16 militia advancing across open ground towards the observation post.

Lance Corporal Roberts-Smith effectively employed his sniper rifle to stop their advance, while his position was peppered by small-arms fire from another group to his flank.

Through his efforts, Lance Corporal Roberts Smith maintained the initiative and ensured that his patrol remained secure by holding this position without support for 20 minutes.

He was eventually reinforced by his original team member and together they continued to hold off the militia for a further 20 minutes until offensive air support arrived.

# Medal for Gallantry

